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SUBJECT: Ambassador Garvelink in Goma December 3

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (SBU) Summary: Ambassador Garvelink's introductory trip to Goma December 3 coincided with commencement of military action in the Mushaki area (west of Sake) by the FARDC against Nkunda's forces. MONUC/North Kivu commander General Narayan told the Ambassador that, the previous day, Nkunda's forces had pushed north from their zone of control, seizing Kikuku and Nyanzale (northwestern Rutshura Territory) along with six tons of arms and several months' pay for the 15th Brigade, which fled. Narayan predicted that, though Nkunda had been boosted by these new arms, the FARDC (with considerable MONUC logistical help) ought to prevail in its campaign against Nkunda within a month and a half. North Kivu Governor Paluku, who had just survived a censure motion in the provincial assembly, lamented that Nkunda was producing increased anti-Tutsi sentiment among the populace. OCHA chief Lavand'homme told the Ambassador that people from Nyanzale and Kikuku were being displaced northward, into an area ever more difficult to access from Goma. With the onset of fighting, all UN humanitarian missions outside the Goma area had been canceled for the time being. Fighting could potentially add 160,000 displaced persons to the present 800-900,000 in the "Petit Nord" (the populous part of North Kivu within 60 miles of Goma). End Summary.

MONUC/North Kivu

2. (SBU) General Narayan said that FARDC had planned to begin its campaign against Nkunda December 5 but had moved up the start date two days because of Nkunda's attack on Kikuku and Nyanzale December 1. Nkunda seized six tons of arms and ammunition as well as pay for the 15th Brigade, which fled the scene. Narayan surmised that Nkunda had good intelligence on the arrival of this pay packet (the 15th Brigade had not been paid since August 15) and that he well knew the weakness of this brigade, as it had similarly fled during fighting near Sake in August and thereafter been moved to the less strategic Nyanzale area. Narayan said that prior to Nkunda's attack on Nyanzale/Kikuku, MONUC had concluded that his forces were suffering from lower morale and diminishing supplies. Through October and November, Nkunda had made probes in the Rushuru area and even on the approach to Goma, but these had gained him nothing.

3. (SBU) Narayan said that FARDC was sticking to its plan, concentrating first on completely clearing the Sake-Masisi road of Nkunda's forces and then turning north into the heartland of Nkunda-held territory (centered around Kirolirwe and Kitchanga, along the western border of Virunga Park). FARDC had commenced heavy firing on the morning of December 3 with artillery, mortars, and two attack helicopters (with Russian pilots). Two brigades (14 and 81) had now taken the height of a strategic ridge ("Celtel" ridge) and would form two pincers to try to take the town of Mushaki, five miles northwest of Sake, on the road to Masisi. MONUC was providing full logistical support. In Narayan's analysis -- a point emphatically seconded by MONUC Head of Office in a subsequent conversation -- the population of North Kivu was overwhelmingly in

favor of military action to eliminate Nkunda and felt that the FDLR problem was secondary.

14. (SBU) The Ambassador asked how the next days would unfold. Narayan said the FARDC was commencing an "all-out offensive" on Nkunda. There was pressure from headquarters for a quick resolution, but Narayan expected the campaign would last a month and a half. There were only 3,000 soldiers with Nkunda but they were relatively good and their leaders (including Bosco) would push them to fight to the last; however, Narayan said, a few significant battlefield reverses might net significant desertions. The FARDC campaign would concentrate on the Sake-Kitchanga corridor rather than on the Nkunda pocket between Rutshura and the Rwandan border, as Nkunda's forces in that pocket would be extremely difficult to root out. Narayan said that there was now an increased threat to the northern part of North Kivu ("Grand Nord") following Nkunda's triumph at Nyanzale and Kikuku, but Narayan said that he doubted Nkunda would move north, even though the FARDC was now extremely thin there. USAID Nash asked whether MONUC was prepared to assure the safety of thousands of mainly Tutsi displaced persons in Kiroliro, to which Narayan responded that FARDC was well aware of the problem and that MONUC was poised to move those IDP's out of harm's way.

OCHA and NGO's

15. (SBU) OCHA chief Patrick Lavand'homme told the Ambassador that there was a movement of displaced persons north from Nyanzale and Kikuku toward Kibirizi and Kanyabonga (no precision on numbers). He said he had "signals" that Nkunda and FARDC were reinforcing near Rutshuru (Nkoko). The UN had canceled all its humanitarian missions outside the Goma area, even recommending against anyone taking the road north to Rutshuru. A few NGO's had not heeded the call to come into Goma, particularly in the Rutshuru area where MONUC was thought to be committed staunchly to defend the city. He had learned that Medecins Sans Frontieres/France (MSF/France) had now safely removed itself from Nyanzale, having decided to stay in the days prior to Nkunda's attack.

16. (SBU) Reviewing the IDP presence in North Kivu, Lavand'homme said that there were close to 400,000 IDP's confirmed since December 2006. He said that there were an additional 100,000 unconfirmed in inaccessible areas. In addition to these recent IDP's, there were 400,000 long-term IDP's dating from conflict in 1996-2000, who were registered but did not receive assistance. Lavand'homme said that the displacements since August 2007 had shown a greater trend toward ethnic division, with Tutsis tending to move into Nkunda-held territory and others toward government-held territory, especially the Kivu coast. The last three weeks had seen an increase of Tutsi IDP's fleeing into Nkunda territory from west and east, due to FDLR and Mai Mai harassment. The UN community had decided to provide equal service to the Kiroliro IDP camp in the heart of Nkunda territory, even though it was mainly made up of women and children and seemed a recruiting ground for Nkunda; indeed, the government had recommended such assistance, wanting to show even-handedness toward Tutsis. USAID Nash noted that he had observed, in a WFP trip to Kiroliro November 29, that at least half of Nkunda's soldiers appeared to be non-Tutsi, presumably Hutu. Lavand'homme suggested that Nkunda's hold on these Hutus was partly due to a long, habitual interrelationship dating from the time the two groups fought together during the 1998-2003 war on the side of the rebel Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie (RCD) movement, and partly to fear of FARDC. He said that defections from Nkunda had been relatively negligible.

17. (SBU) Lavand'homme calculated that the present fighting could add 160,000 IDP's in the Petit Nord, in addition to IDP's who would be undergoing multiple displacement. Lavand'homme said that the Nyanzale area had earlier been projected as a zone of likely refuge for IDP's, as the UN community had not expected that the 15th Brigade to fall to Nkunda; now it had become a zone of displacement. There was no airport in the Nyanzale area to facilitate transport of assistance to these IDP's, but the road from Goma to Kanyabayonga was serviceable.

18. (SBU) In a following meeting with NGO's, the Ambassador asked for thoughts on where the international community should put

humanitarian emphasis in North Kivu. UNHCR noted FARDC harassment in IDP camps as a very serious issue, along with lack of access to significant swathes of territory and, now, the problem of ensuring safe passage for Tutsis and others now to be displaced and redisplaced. ICRC highlighted the notorious lack of discipline in the FARDC. WFP emphasized the scale of killing, sexual violence, and looting, and the intractable problems of land tenure ("all of North Kivu is owned by five people") and impunity/absence of a system of justice. UNDP said that planning for a possible era when fighting ended would need to emphasize income-generating for farmers and fishermen, rehabilitation of infrastructure and social services, and a push for peace and reconciliation among the ethnic communities. OCHA put in a plea for diplomacy rather than military action, noting that MONUC had its hands tied, being unable to talk directly to Nkunda.

#### Call on Governor

¶9. (SBU) The Ambassador's first call was on Governor Julien Paluku (a Nande from the Grand Nord), who focused on Nkunda. In a long review of recent history, Paluku said that the government had tried a diplomatic approach with Nkunda, which had failed. Nkunda attempted to justify himself as a protector of the Tutsi community and a champion of the return of Congolese Tutsi refugees now in Rwanda. In fact, there had been no traditional animosity toward Tutsis in Congo, a country where every ethnic group is a minority. Nkunda had been a key military commander during Rwanda's "imperium" over eastern Congo 1998-2003 and done nothing to repatriate Tutsi refugees at that time. In Paluku's view, the worrying trend was that Nkunda was bringing about an antagonism to Tutsis that had not previously existed. No Tutsi had been elected to the provincial assembly during the recent elections, but it had in turn selected a Tutsi as a senator. Paluku had chosen a Tutsi as his provincial planning/budget minister, as well as several staff members. The Ambassador inquired what Nkunda's real objectives were, to which Paluku responded that he did not know. Whatever they were, Nkunda had to be eradicated. His presence was sowing instability.

¶10. (SBU) The Ambassador asked what impact the fighting that was just getting under way would have on the civilian population. Paluku said if the military campaign were not carefully executed, it would be likely to see the number of IDP's in the area exceed one million. He feared that there would even be a threat to food adequacy in Goma itself. Paluku regretted that the government had not been effective in getting out the message of the real situation on the ground. The Ambassador, introducing political officer Haywood Rankin, said that accurate information-gathering was one of the principal reasons that the United States had wanted a presence in Goma. Paluku welcomed Rankin, apologizing that he had not received him in the five days since he had arrived in Goma. He explained that he had had to fight a censure motion in the provincial assembly, on spurious grounds of embezzling public funds. He had spent most of December 1 defending himself - successfully it turned out - in the assembly against this motion. He was pleased to report the vote on the motion of censure was 27 to 15 in his favor, while he had been elected by the assembly several months ago by a vote of 25 to 17.

¶11. (SBU) Paluku exclaimed, "If the United States is involved in anything, a week is enough to solve it." The Ambassador said that he only wished it were so. Paluku concluded if the United States succeeded, it would be the greatest news for the people of North Kivu.

Garvelink